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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2016

Ready, set, GO

Niagara's push for GO train
service continues.
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Socks raise stink

Mother smoking mad after school tells
teen to remove stockings.
Page 3

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Deep freeze fun

FRANK RUZYCKI/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Grade 4 student Tristan Gullion, left in blue hat, takes a shot on net during a game of hockey at McKay Public School's winter carnival in Port Colborne last week.

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The long train towards getting GO in Niagara

GRANT LAFLECHE
Postmedia Network

Under any other circumstance, the premier of Ontario trapped in gridlock, leaving a Niagara delegation waiting to be a source of annoyance.

The collection of Niagara politicians and staff were anxious for the meeting. They had lost their opportunity to sit down with Kathleen Wynne and her transportation minister, Steven Del Duca, more than a month earlier when the premier dissolved the legislature and called an election.

Oct. 23, 2014, represented a second chance to convince Queen's Park to expand GO rail service to Niagara, with commuter stops in Grimsby, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls.

The delegation waiting at White Oaks Resort in Niagara-on-the-Lake had done, including a positive environmental assessment from the body that governs GO, Metrolinx, to support their case. More critically, they had something that almost always eludes politics in Niagara — a united front.

The typical provincialism Niagara is known for was cast aside. All 12 mayors, the regional chairman and all of regional boards and committees spoke in a single voice on an issue many of them labelled a "game-changer".

But the premier was late, creeping forward in dense traffic on the Queen's Highway in Way. And had this been a meeting about anything other than trains, the delay might have hobbled the delegation's efforts.

Instead, it helped prove a point.

"Someone asked me afterwards if I had put tacks on the highway, and I said, 'If I thought of it, you're damn right I would have,'" says Niagara Falls Mayor Jim Diodati. "But the reality is, the premier getting stuck in traffic and being late for a meeting in Niagara made the point clearer than we could have: We need GO in Niagara."

Part of the case for GO rail to Niagara is the assumption that it would reduce congestion on the QEW and 406 highways, which slows down the movement of people and goods, which costs money across several sectors.

Del Duca says the gridlock problem is one impacting most of southern Ontario that doesn't just cost money but impacts quality of life for many people.

Whether it was the object lesson of Wynne being stuck in traffic, the delegation's presen-



ALIE JOCHAM/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Clockwise from top left: Bob Bentley, mayor of Grimsby; Alan Caslin, regional chair; Pat Darte, lord mayor of Niagara-on-the-Lake; Jim Diodati, mayor of Niagara Falls; Dan Carnegie, CAO of St. Catharines; Ken Todd, CAO of Niagara Falls; Matt Robinson, Region associate director of communications; and Sandra Easton, mayor of Lincoln, work on a plan to bring GO to Niagara in a war room they have set up at the Niagara Region head office.

tation or both, the meeting at White Oaks changed the direction of the effort to bring the rail service to the region.

According to people in attendance, the premier instructed his provincial staff to start working closely with the regional delegation to put together a comprehensive business case for the expansion of GO rail into Niagara.

A resulting report — compiled in consultation with both the MTO and Metrolinx — was first published in April 2015. Since then, the regional working group has revised the report to answer a series of questions from the province. The document is now under final review by Queen's Park.

"I don't think there is anything about how the region can do it," says St. Catharines MPP Jim Bradley. "I think they have done a very good job of putting their case forward and answering all the questions the provincial government has."

With the hard work done in Niagara, all the region can do is wait, Bradley says.

Everyone involved in the Niagara GO plan — from regional chairman Alan Caslin to Ontario's minister of transportation — suggest the timing for a possible expansion into the region could not be better.

"There is an alignment happening between the municipal, provincial and now the federal government, which is promising billions more in infrastructure funding," says Del Duca. "No one wants to drag a process on longer than necessary and I think we are getting very close to making some very exciting announcements."

Along with its completed business plan, the region is putting money where its mouth

is. The projected costs for a Niagara GO expansion is between \$100 million and \$120 million.

Caslin says the project will likely follow other large infrastructure efforts whereby local, provincial and federal governments share costs. To that end, the region has set aside \$10 million for GO expansion, with regional council ready to commit another \$30 million.

"We're ready," Caslin says. Niagara may be closer than it has ever been to bringing GO rail to Niagara, but the road to get this point has been a long one.

Talk about commuter GO service in Niagara predates the 2009 launch of a summer service to Niagara Falls. But it didn't get serious legs until spring 2011. Metrolinx was exploring GO expansion ideas and released an environmental assessment report about expansion to Niagara. It invited local politicians to comment on the report.

Diodati says he and former St. Catharines mayor Brian McMillan saw the request for commentary as an opportunity to push GO Niagara from a hypothetical into a political reality.

"So we put a motion before regional council, asking for council to support the idea of GO rail to Niagara Falls with stops in St. Catharines and Grimsby," Diodati says. "We got unanimous support."

The next two years saw some attempts drive the agenda forward, including Diodati pushing for Niagara GO expansion to happen in time for the 2015 Pan Am Games.

Local politicians were also advocating the idea when they travelled to Queen's Park for "Niagara Week" — an annual session when Niagara leaders can meet with provincial poli-

ticians to lobby for support on local issues.

Many local leaders saw GO as a key economic driver for the region, and were growing frustrated with what they perceived as a cold shoulder from Queen's Park and Metrolinx.

Businesses were unable to attract talent from outside Niagara because there is no rail commute to Hamilton or Toronto, Diodati says. Brock University and Niagara College get passed over by students living outside the region, and local residents lose job opportunities outside Niagara.

No amount of saying this was making a difference, however.

Diodati says part of the problem was the fractured political message coming from Niagara.

Instead, there was a patchwork coming from the whole region. GO was part of a series of requests from several Niagara municipalities. Grimsby would ask for one piece of the puzzle, while St. Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls were asking for other parts. It gave the impression that while GO was the problem, it wasn't that pressing an issue.

"The idea is a priority that everything is a priority," says Diodati. "We had to get on the same page." By 2014 it was obvious Niagara had to come together politically to become part of Metrolinx's expansion plans.

Led by then regional chairman Gary Burroughs, the region and all 12 mayors issued a joint public letter saying that GO Niagara was their highest priority.

During the Niagara Falls provincial byelection, the mayors issued another letter asking candidates where they stood on GO.

"Then in March, Burroughs

said that with the support of council and the mayors, Niagara Week would focus on one subject — GO."

Although agendas were drawn up and meetings scheduled, Niagara Week plans died when Wynne scuttled the legislature and called an election.

The Liberal government returned to office, however, and the meeting at White Oaks was scheduled.

Four days after that meeting, Ontario municipal elections changed Niagara's political landscape. Key players on the GO file, including McMillan, Niagara-on-the-Lake Mayor David Eke and Lincoln Mayor Bill Hodgson were defeated or did not seek re-election. Burroughs, the face of Niagara's GO efforts, was replaced as regional chairman by Caslin.

By that time, the region was utterly ingrained as a regional priority, even for new council members, Caslin says.

"Everyone recognizes that GO is a net benefit for the entire region," says Caslin.

St. Catharines' new mayor, Walter Sendzik, used GO as part of his election platform, and is as committed to the project as his predecessor.

"GO is a game-changer, no question," he says. "It really will connect Niagara to the larger economy of the Greater Toronto-Hamilton area, which is how it should be."

As work began on the comprehensive business plan in early 2015, Sendzik says no cracks in Niagara's united front were evident.

"There is definitely was never a moment that I can recall where we had to convince someone to stay at the table," Sendzik says. "Everyone gets it."

The new plan was being put together with the help of a former Metrolinx consultant, a Niagara GO awareness campaign was launched that included rallies, web commercials and a letter-writing campaign.

The province was receptive to the report when it was finished in April, but sent back a list of 17 questions.

"We've been co-operating very hard and co-operatively to answer those questions," Caslin says.

One of those questions had the potential to derail the plan — crossing the Welland Canal.

Initially, the proposed GO schedule included a built-in 20-minute delay to accommodate the bridge being raised for passing ships on the canal.

While clever, the solution was still problematic for Metrolinx, which found the delay too disruptive to the overall train schedule.

Caslin says talks with St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corp. resulted in an amendment to the plan. GO trains will get priority if both a ship and a train are about to intersect at the canal.

As suited as lower tier municipal leaders are on the project, there are some dissenting voices.

Niagara Centre Liberal MP Vance Badaway says while he supports the idea, a GO expansion won't happen until Niagara has its own fully integrated regional transit system up and running.

"The reality is, in my opinion, until we get an integrated transit system in Niagara, GO won't realistically consider Niagara as a destination."

Technically speaking, regional transit is not a prerequisite for GO. In the interim, the region is pushing to transform Niagara-wide transit system, Caslin says.

Both Sendzik and Diodati say they would be willing to dissolve their municipalities and commissions in favour of a unified Niagara transit system, provided their communities still get the service they have today and other municipalities pay into the system.

The GO report itself says that "pieces have also been put into motion to finalize a regional transportation master plan, and are pending favourable provincial decisions on GO rail expansion."

The plan is now completed and in the hands of the provincial government.

While the strategic plan for the next five years does not mention Niagara, however, Del Duca says the province wants to take advantage of new federal infrastructure dollars and expects to act more rather than passively.

That said, he will not say when an announcement will be coming other than to say the province is moving as quickly as it can.

"We've had a lot of I have to do management expectations," Del Duca says.

"This proposal has many moving parts. Unlike other regional systems, dealing with the province and CN ownership on the lines. So we have to talk with them, and we are having those talks. But I don't want to commit to a time frame and then miss it."

Weed socks cause stink at school

RAY SPITERI
Postmedia Network

They are known as weed socks.

To 13-year-old Bethany Aello, they are just the latest cool and trendy piece of clothing that all her friends are wearing.

But apparently they are not approved to show off at Prince Philip Public School.

The garment is officially called HUF Plantlife, but are also known as weed socks. They come in different colours and styles, and have a number of marijuana leaf symbols on them.

Aello's mother, Tiffany, was taken aback about what unfolded last week at the Niagara Falls elementary school.

Tiffany said her daughter was asked by the vice-principal to remove her socks at school.

I said the vice-principal called me out of the situation. I said, 'May I ask why?' And she said, 'Because I find them offensive and so do the students in the class,' said Tiffany.

I said, 'Pardon me. First of all, how many take these socks off? It's winter and she was wearing boots and she didn't have another pair.'

The socks Bethany wore are grey, with black marijuana leaves on them.

Tiffany described them as a 'new fad' for teens.

She said she asked the vice principal what she found so offensive with the socks and was told, 'they're weed socks.'

'It's just a flower, as far as I'm concerned,' said Tiffany, adding there's no words or statements on the socks. 'It also doesn't say what they call them, the weed sock. It doesn't say that.'

She said the vice principal said there's a 'fine line.'

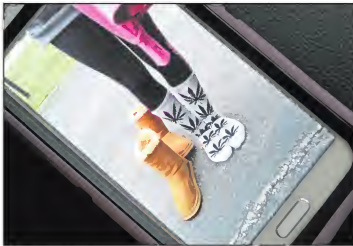
'I said, 'Well, is my kid going around saying, oh, I'm smoking weed?' I said, 'No, she wore the socks because she liked them, that's what she wanted, that's what she got for her birthday. We don't condone any of that. They're socks.'

Prince Philip principal Lynn Tisdal referred media inquiries last Thursday to the District School Board of Niagara communications department.

DSBN spokesman Brett Sweeney said the incident happened last Tuesday afternoon.

He said three students approached school administration with concerns about the socks.

Sweeney said the vice-principal had a 'very quiet' conversation with the student and asked the student to either remove the



NINA DINIATSI/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Niagara Falls resident Tiffany Aello was taken aback by the reaction her daughter got from her school after they deemed the socks she wore were inappropriate.

socks or go to the administration office and 'work there quietly for the remainder of the day.'

He said the student chose to remove the socks. Sweeney said the student was wearing 'warm, fuzzy boots.'

'It was during the last block of the day. There were no more nutrition breaks. The student was not sent outside. The student was inside the whole time.'

Sweeney said the socks were disrupting the class, they were getting in the way of a learning environment and made some students uncomfortable.

Tiffany said her daughter brought the pair of socks earlier this month when she and a friend were at the Zumbie store at the Pen Centre mall in St. Catharines.

The store, which markets clothing for action sports and is popular with teens, passed a reporter's questions to head office. A representative could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Both Tiffany and Bethany said they don't smoke marijuana.

'I just felt like getting them because they look really cool,' said Bethany, adding it had nothing to do with marijuana. 'I know a lot of people (that have the socks).'

She said other kids at the school wear the socks, but they hide them from school officials.

Bethany, who is a Grade 7 student, said when she wore them to school earlier this week, they were covered by her

boots.

She said school officials became aware she was wearing the socks when her friend 'was telling everyone at school.'

Bethany said she wasn't embarrassed by the situation, but was a 'little upset' because 'my feet were really cold.'

Tiffany said the vice-principal called her later that evening and told her Bethany can wear the socks, as long as they're not shown and she doesn't bring attention to them.

'She should be allowed to wear what she wants. It's good for me to make that judgment, not someone else,' said Tiffany. 'She's not in a Catholic school. It requires that special uniform.'

According to DSNB's website, each school has a policy regarding what is and is not appropriate to wear to school.

According to Prince Philip's dress code, '...shirts with questionable messages are not appropriate for school.' It also states, 'Staff reserves the right to request a student change their attire if the clothing is deemed to be inappropriate for school.'

Some public schools are more specific in their dress code.

For example, Ontario Public School's In Theord explicitly states, 'Clothing which advertises or promotes alcoholic beverages, drugs, violence or racism or that displays obscene, distasteful or harmful messages is not to be worn at school, on field trips, or activities.'

Sweeney said while each school is responsible for setting their own dress code, the

'general principle' is that clothing 'should be appropriate for a school environment and a learning environment.'

Sweeney said they identify 'things such as alcohol or drugs' as not appropriate for students to have at school, therefore it's 'simply inappropriate' to have clothing that 'promotes or references' them.

He said the student was not suspended or disciplined 'in any way.'

'The student was very cooperative and was very co-operative when spoken to by the vice principal.'

Sweeney said DSNB schools are 'not in the business of inspecting attire.'

'If it's not seen and not disruptive, we're not going to be searching out and investigating.'

While the federal government plans to legalize marijuana, Sweeney said 'alcohol and cigarettes are legal, but not for an elementary school population.'

'Tiffany said symbols mean different things to different people, depending on their culture and beliefs.'

Asked if she can understand why the school viewed the socks as having marijuana leaf symbols on them, Tiffany said, 'That's their judgment. They shouldn't judge. Everybody has a different judgment on that.'

'One of the girls said, 'Oh those are pretty flowers.' We had no idea if any other purposes than getting the socks for socks.'

'We live in 2016. It's what it is, it's socks.'

Niagara would benefit as a whole with GO

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

Vance Badwey says bringing the GO train to Niagara is needed 'sooner rather than later' — but he doubts it will happen unless Niagara first resolves its own transportation issues.

'There's no question I would support it, but the reality is it isn't going to happen,' the Niagara Centre Liberal MP said.

'The reality is, in my opinion, until we get an integrated transit system in Niagara, GO won't realistically consider Niagara as a destination. 'If I'm wrong it's great,' he said. 'But let's face it, GO is not here yet, and I think there's some reasoning behind that.'

He said extending GO train to Niagara would 'open up the region both for economics as well as lifestyle.'

'There's no question that folks moving in and out of Niagara could utilize a service such as GO on an hourly, daily basis,' he said.

But it's equally important, he said, to have an inter-municipal transit system in Niagara in order to be able to access GO train stations from anywhere in the region.

While Niagara Region staff and councillors have been 'doing the best they can' to make GO train service a reality in Niagara, Badwey said that would happen 'a lot sooner rather than later' if inter-municipal transit was operating simultaneously.

He said Ottawa may be able to help in the meantime.

'The federal government has been very clear within our infrastructure fund that we're going to spend \$68 billion towards transit. And there's an opportunity as well ... that an application can be made' for funding.

Although it doesn't seem that the GO train would be heading into south Niagara — if it ever does arrive — the entire region is expected to benefit.

'I think it is definitely a win for all of Niagara,' said Dolores Fabiano, executive officer of south Niagara's chambers of commerce.

'More people are commuting farther and farther for work, but they want to maintain that lifestyle here.'

She said GO train service would give people an easy option for doing that, regardless of where they live in the region.

Port Colborne Mayor John Maloney said driving to north Niagara to catch a GO train would certainly be preferable to driving all the way to Toronto.

'Anyone who has driven into Toronto recently can appreciate the congestion that is there every day, and certainly in bad weather it's even worse,' he said.

Although south Niagara communities would not benefit to the same extent as communities directly visited by the train, 'if it brings economic development into Niagara, then we will definitely benefit from that as well,' Maloney said.



FILE PHOTO SPECIAL TO POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Walter Sendzik, left, Jim Dinodati and Allan Caslin on a GO train at Burlington station.

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P POSTMEDIA

Always caring, never killing

FATHER DAVID GRAHAM SCOTT

St. Ignace of Antioch Orthodox Church

Parliament has until June 6 to legislate on euthanasia and assisted suicide.

On Feb. 6, 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that the provisions of the Criminal Code against euthanasia and assisted suicide were unconstitutional, effective Feb. 6, 2016.

The Justin Trudeau government successfully asked for an extension of that 12-month suspension and was granted that until June 6. Certain exemptions permitted euthanasia and assisted suicide during this four-month extension.

Prime Minister Trudeau himself has expressed approval for Quebec's law permitting medical aid in dying. But medical aid in dying is really a euphemism for killing.

Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide corrupt the medical profession by using tools of healing as techniques for killing. They distort the doctor-patient relationship and provide perverse incentives for insurance providers and impatient beneficiaries.

Physicians whose conscience is guided by Judeo-Christian ethics or by Hippocrates' Oath

are committed not to harm to their patients. But the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons' governing council ruled that doctors opposing assisted suicide or euthanasia must refer suicidal patients to doctors willing to kill them.

This ruling contradicts not only ethics and Hippocrates but also the fundamental freedom of conscience and religion in the Constitution. The president of the Canadian Psychiatric Association warned last month that the Supreme Court's concern that a person should not be induced to take his or her own life, comes into consideration because mentally ill people suffer from cognitive distortions that impair insight and judgment.

Dr. Monica Branigan of the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians said last month that dying patients want to shorten their lives can and do change their minds. She said that Canada's first priority should be to increase access to palliative care. A patient who got his pain under control through palliative care changed his mind about seeking assisted suicide.

She also suggested that one safeguard against premature death could be a waiting

period. But the experience of Belgium and the Netherlands shows that safeguards do not actually work and are slowly eroded.

Many Canadians were shocked by the provincial-territorial expert panel on assisted suicide recommendation that there should be no "arbitrary age limits" for choosing assisted death. Co-chair Maureen Taylor said, "I could definitely see 12-year-olds having that capacity, and I could see 16-year-olds not have that capacity."

Most of us have neither the time nor the background to speak to the parliamentary committee presently conducting hearings on assisted dying legislation. Indeed the committee has to come up with recommendations for a federal law by Feb. 26.

But we can and should consider reading and signing the Declaration on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide prepared by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, available at www.euthanasiadeclaration.ca and signed by well more than 13,000 Canadians.

Signatories include Metropolitan Sotirios of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto and President of the Canadian Conference of

Orthodox Bishops, and Archbishop Iremee of Ottawa, Orthodox Church in America.

The declaration has not only widespread Evangelical, Catholic and Orthodox support, but that of Jewish rabbis and Muslim imams as well. It states that its signatories affirm, "the sanctity of all human life, and the equal and indivisible dignity of every human being."

"On the basis of our respective traditions and beliefs, we insist that any action intended to end human life is morally and ethically wrong. Together, we are determined to work to alleviate human suffering in every form but never by intentionally eliminating those who suffer."

The declaration urges legislators "to enact and uphold laws that enhance human solidarity by promoting the right to life and security for all people; to make good-quality home care and palliative care accessible in all jurisdictions, and to implement regulations and policies that ensure respect for the freedom of conscience of all health-care workers and administrators who will not and cannot accept suicide or euthanasia as a medical solution to pain and suffering."

"It is particular attention and palliative care and not assisted suicide or euthanasia that best uphold the worth of the human person."

Southern-tier mayors luncheon a good gauge of progress

DOLORES FABIANO

Special to Postmedia Network

In the coming months there will be a number of state of the city addresses by our local mayors. These events are a good opportunity to hear from our elected officials, not only for what their achievements have been to date, but also what the plans are for the immediate and long-term future.

In south Niagara, the chambers of commerce have been presenting a unique spin on this event. For the past decade, we have been hosting the Southern Tier Mayors Luncheons, which gives our members the opportunity to hear six mayors on one stage on one day. Some may regard this as a nightmare, and I can understand that initial reaction.

For years now, the Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, Port Colborne-Wainfleet and Welland-Pelham chambers of commerce have collaborated on presenting this event. The respective mayors of each of these six communities have come together time and again to provide us with a little more than

what one might expect.

The biggest complaint we consistently hear about in Niagara is that no one ever works together. That is that we are never on the same page, we never speak with one voice and we just can't get our act together.

The goal of the participating chambers of commerce 10 years ago (when we initially kicked this off) was to get our mayors together so they could deliver their messages as a group. That way, we could all start to see where the opportunities to work closer together might be, and how we could support each other's initiatives. To be fair, years one and two may have been a little disjointed. There was definitely a learning curve for everyone involved.

The format, however, has evolved into an excellent opportunity for our mayors to work together and bring their message to the business community. It demonstrates how — contrary to popular opinion — the mayors are in fact working together and supportive of the things that are happening across the region.

There have certainly been issues where



St. Catharines mayor Walter Sondzik gives his state of the city address at Club Roma.

they have not agreed, and it has been interesting to watch them navigate those topics. Each mayor is most concerned about the municipality they represent, just as the chambers are most concerned about their respective members. This is as it should be.

But leadership is the ability to see something beyond your own backyard, and have the vision to help move it forward for the greater good. I encourage everyone to come out to this year's event to see what I mean. See that we do have great leadership, and that partnership across the region does exist.

This luncheon is an example of just that.

We look forward to hosting the 2016 Southern Tier Mayors Luncheon on March 22 at the Italian Hall in Port Colborne. Registration starts at 11:30 a.m., lunch at noon, with the presentation wrapping up about 2 p.m. Tickets cost \$40 per member, \$50 for non-members, and may be purchased through Port Colborne-Wainfleet Chamber of Commerce.

This is typically a sold-out event. With limited seating, interested parties should book soon to avoid disappointment.

Dolores Fabiano is executive director of Niagara Falls, Port Colborne-Wainfleet and Welland-Pelham chambers of commerce.

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Mom thought he was dead

BILL SAWCHUK
Postmedia Network

Some missing pieces in the life of a man who started his own cold case are solving to allow him to return to life.

Edgar Latulip was 21 years old when he was last seen in Kitchener on Sept. 2, 1986.

Thirty years later, he has turned up safe in St. Catharines. He rediscovered his identity after he began to have flashbacks from his past life. His memory had gone blank after he suffered a head injury decades ago.

"This is a new one for me," Const. Phil Gavin of the Niagara Regional Police said shortly after concluding an interview with CNN about Latulip. "I've never seen anything like this before."

Latulip is developmentally delayed, and functions at the level of a child, his mother Sylvia Wilson told Kitchener-Waterloo Record.

Gavin confirmed Latulip was living in St. Catharines under a different name.

"He had a different identity," Gavin said. "We aren't sure yet exactly how he came to have it, but he lived under that name for 30 years."

"One of the questions we had was how he existed under another name. The heat answer we have for you is that answers were different in 1986 than they are in 2016."

It was a different world when it came to getting the pieces of your life in order,

whether it was receiving a driver's licence or OHIP assistance.

"If you really needed help, and you had support, and you went into an agency, they could probably make it happen for you."

Before he disappeared from Kitchener, Latulip was receiving a disability pension and living in a rented room in a home that provided him with meals. Wilson told police the last time she saw her son was in hospital after a suicide attempt.

Latulip has told police he left Kitchener by bus after he left his group home. At the time, investigators suspected he might have gone to Niagara Falls to end his life, and his body had never been recovered. That's what his mother had come to believe.

"We think he got on a bus, and the bus took him to Niagara Falls, and then he wandered on to St. Catharines," Gavin said. "That's when

he suffered the head injury. When he kind of woke up, things were a lot different for him."

Latulip was "living independently" in the community. Sometime in December he began to remember details of his previous life, Gavin said.

Latulip shared the information with a social worker, who Googled his name and took the information to the police.

In early January, Latulip went to the police station in St. Catharines and submitted to a voluntary DNA test. The results were sent to the Centre of Forensic Sciences in Toronto and compared with family members. A month later his identity was confirmed.

Police in Kitchener-Waterloo are preparing to help him make contact with his surviving relatives.

"We have been in touch with the family members and they are aware of it and hoping to reconnect with him,"

Det.-Const. Duane Gingerich of the Waterloo Regional Police said.

"There are some logistics that need to happen in the next little while, and there is a lot for everyone to process."

Gingerich said Kitchener-Waterloo police have had a dedicated missing person unit and have been actively working cold cases over the past two years.

"We have been revisiting all these old cases," he said.

"You try to keep the information out there, and in Edgar's case, there was quite a hit on the Internet. A lot of different websites had information about him. It's a thrill for us, but most of it had to do with Edgar himself."

"We try to refresh the media from time to time about the cold cases. It helps keep people aware of it."

"In the end, you don't know where these people are. Thirty years after the fact they



Edgar Latulip

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INPORT-NEWS

Winger students learn the power of magic

FRANK IKEMAN
PostMedia Network

Winger Public School got a lesson in self-confidence and the power of magic last Wednesday.

Illusionist Claude Haggerty spent the day running a magic workshop for 25 students, preparing them to put on a show for the school community Wednesday evening.

"Normally we ask for children who may not always get a chance to shine, so 25 shy children come in in the morning and by 3 or 3:30 these 25 children are ready to perform that night," Haggerty said.

Learning to perform magic tricks and illusions helped him through the foster-care system and with a stutter when he was in school.

"I stuttered most of my life but I always wanted to be a magician, and I remember back in elementary school my teachers and principal helped me practice magic tricks so I could do them without stuttering," he said.

He's since pulled off several grand illusions, including making elephants disappear, and has performed for large audiences across the continent.

Now he's paying it forward, travelling to schools to offer the free workshop to help students gain confidence in themselves.

"He has a very compelling story about having come through the foster care system and having challenges through school, and how setting goals has meant a lot to him and how finding this thing that isn't classically part of the education system like magic and performing, really



I stuttered most of my life but I always wanted to be a magician, and I remember back in elementary school my teachers and principal helped me practice magic tricks so I could do them without stuttering."

Illusionist Claude Haggerty

was this thing for him that allowed him to have a bunch of success," said Winger Public School principal Michael Burns. Burns said the workshop was well received by the students and the school community was looking forward to the evening performance.

"I think in schools it's important to make sure we do that," Burns said.

"We don't necessarily have those resources right here for us in the school, so when a great person from the community can come and provide this opportunity, I think it's important."

"And I also think it's true that in schools sometimes we have to be careful that we're not just valuing kids who have academic strengths, and not just kids that have certain kinds of athletic strengths, but that we expose kids to all kinds of ways that they can shine and feel good about themselves."



Illusionist Claude Haggerty teaches a magic trick to Winger Public School students Megan Gibson, left, and Jairus Fair.

FRANK IKEMAN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Getting a handle on age-friendliness

FRANK IKEMAN
PostMedia Network

Port Colborne will be reaching out to members of the community for input on the age-friendliness of the city.

The city was one of 56 across the province to receive a grant from the Ontario government and sponsored by Senior Secretariat of Ontario to assist with an age-friendly needs assessment.

"It's all captured in this new movement to address being prepared for a large population of older citizens," said Pearl Paul, Port Colborne's age-friendly needs assessment co-ordinator.

Paul said the assessment aims to hear feedback from residents on how they feel the city performs in public spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment opportunities, communication and information, and health and community support.

The assessment will be done through surveys aimed at all members of the community, through focus groups for seniors and caregivers and through question-and-answer sessions with the city's business and service providers.

"I think it's a rare thing for people in a community to be asked on an individual basis what they think," Paul said.

The results of the needs assessment will culminate in a report to be ready by the end of June.

Surveys can be picked up at the Port Colborne library, City Hall, Roselawn Centre and Vale Health and Wellness Centre.

Surveys take place Feb. 11 to April 8, focus group sessions will take place March through May and the Q&A sessions will happen in March and April.

For more information, contact agefriendly@portcolborne.ca.

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Livestock losses in barn fires causing concern

ALISON LANGLEY
Postmedia Network

Local fire departments are sounding the alarm on fire safety in barns in light of a series of recent devastating fires resulted in massive loss of animal life and millions of dollars in property damage.

Four separate fires at Ontario barns in January claimed the lives of 56 horses, 500 goats, 30 cattle and approximately 2,000 pigs.

More than 80 dairy cows died following a barn fire Feb. 1.

"Given the delayed detection time, the large load of combustible fuels (hay and straw), and lack of available water, it puts the fire department in a deficit right from the start," said Larry Coplen, chief of the Fort Erie Fire Department.

"Anything a farmer can do to be proactive and ensure there are no sources of ignition will go a long way."

Local fire departments say barn owners can follow a few safety precautions to reduce the risk of a fire.

"You need to practice good housekeeping in barns," said Brian Dickson, chief of fire prevention with the Niagara Falls Fire Department. "You need to keep the barn clean and organized. That is crucial. And, absolutely no smoking, that rule should be strictly adhered to."

He also recommends owners develop and practice an escape plan, similar to a home escape plan.

"Plan ahead," Dickson added. "Make sure there's a plan for what to do in the event of an emergency."

He also recommends owners consider investing in a wireless smoke alarm and using a smart phone app which will alert users to an emergency.

"The system might cost a couple of hundred dollars but, compared to the price of sav-

ing a barn and the livestock, it's a small price to pay," Dickson said.

The office of the Ontario Fire Marshal estimates that barn fires represent an average annual cost of more than \$25 million in Ontario.

"These tragic incidents underscore the need for owners and operators to identify, and eliminate, potential fire risks on agricultural properties, including in their barns and stables," said Ontario Fire Marshal Ross Nichols.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs recently issued a list of "best practices" to follow to reduce the risk of barn fires.

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Twitter: @thisislangley

BARN FIRE STATISTICS

- 2012: 136 fire incidents, \$16 million loss
- 2013: 157 fire incidents, \$31.8 million loss
- 2014: 150 fire incidents, \$28.4 million loss

Fires at Ontario barns

- Jan. 5: 43 Standardbred horses killed in a barn fire in Puslinch
- Jan. 14: 13 Arabian horses killed in a barn fire in Mount Forest
- Jan. 17: Barn fire near Delaware kills 500 goats and 30 cattle
- Jan. 19: Barn fire in Parkhill kills nearly 2,000 pigs
- Feb. 1: Barn fire in Elgin County kills 85 dairy cows

Best practices

- Have a qualified professional complete assessments of all farm buildings and have electrical equipment inspected yearly by a licensed contractor
- Keep the area around heat lamps clear of clutter or bedding materials and only use heat lamps with the CSA or UL label
- Check exposed electrical equipment for corroded parts and repair damaged fixtures or equipment as soon as possible
- Avoid storing fuels and chemicals such as gasoline, cleaning fluids or solvents inside barns
- Keep a fire extinguisher on hand and make sure a reliable source of water is available and easily accessible by fire departments

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Jeff Dunham plays the Niagara Fallsview Casino May 19 and 20.

POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Jeff Dunham bringing puppet party to Fallsview

POSTMEDIA NETWORK

It's one puppet show the kids will have to miss.

Comedian Jeff Dunham and his cost of oil-tempered, wildly popular characters will do two shows at the Niagara Fallsview Casino, May 19 and 20.

Ranked as one of the top-grossing comedians of the past decade, Dunham has sold seven million DVDs and notched nearly a billion views on YouTube with his ventriloquist act, which sees him voice unruly characters like old man Walter and beer-guzzling redneck Bubba J.

Tickets start at \$75.

Also appearing in May will be Christopher Cross, who owns one of the most dominant nights in Grammy his-

tory. In 1961, Cross swept four major categories: Album of the Year, Record of the Year, Song of the Year and Best New Artist.

He'll be part of the Songwriters Series May 14.

Tickets start at \$40.

RJ Thomas (Baindrops Keep Fallin' on my Head) plays May 21 (\$25), along with 3 Doors Down May 12 and 13 (\$50), 1 Tenor May 4 to 8 (\$85), Renzo Arbore & his Orchestra May 14 and 15 (\$85) and an extended run of Lord of the Dance: Dangerous Games May 25 to June 5 (\$85).

Tickets for all May shows are on sale at the Fallsview Box Office and all Ticketmaster outlets.

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JOHN LAW/POSTMEDIA NETWORK
Serena Pryne and Nick Lesyk, right, of Niagara band The Mandevilles, will be the acoustic openers for Heart and Joan Jett for 10 Canadian dates in March.

Mandevilles to open for Heart, Joan Jett

JOHN LAW
Postmedia Network

It's one thing to open up for a legendary band in the biggest venues you've ever played.

It's another when you're opening up for two of your biggest influences.

Serena Pryne, lead singer of Niagara's Mandevilles, will be pinching herself next month when she finds herself opening up for her all-time favourites, Heart and Joan Jett.

Pryne and longtime musical partner Nick Lesyk start a cross-Canada tour with the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees starting March 7 in Abbotsford, B.C.

"We've done one-off shows and some pretty big tours with really big bands, but Heart and Joan Jett is a step further than we've done before," says Pryne. "It's pretty massive. Everybody knows their songs."

Lesyk says the band's agent told them about the possibility of joining the tour last fall, with one catch: It had to be acoustic. That meant the whole band wasn't required.

He wasn't getting his hopes up. He says the band was coming off a rough patch ("We were rebuilding for the 11th or 12th time") after a fallout with former management, and expected more bad news.

Instead, Ann Wilson of Heart took one listen to Pryne's vocals and made the decision.

Pryne and Riot will open 10 Canadian dates of the tour, ending March 21 in Montreal. Cheap Trick will open the American dates.

Pryne says most every female rock singer has borrowed a page or two from Jett and Heart's Wilson sisters.

"They're the real deal, especially Joan Jett," she says. "Just the way she looks captivated me when I was a kid. She's amazing to look at, (and) the raw power chords and guttural vocals... I love that. I

really gravitate towards that because it's so real with her.

"And Heart, first of all both sisters are incredible musicians. I can't wait to hear the Wilsons play live. Ann Wilson's voice is bang on. If you saw that Zeppelin tribute they did not too long ago, that blew my mind."

Even as an opening act, these will be among the biggest shows ever for the Welland band formerly known as Oliver Black. Venues on the tour include Montreal's Bell Centre and Winnipeg's MTS Centre. The closest date will be March 20 at Toronto's Sony Centre for the Performing Arts.

The Mandevilles released their latest album, *Windows and Scenes*, in 2014. If there's a downer to the good news, it's that three members of the band — drummer Brett Bendo, bassist Waylon Glantz and guitarist Taylor Lasso — won't be able to take part. But Pryne and Lesyk will retain the band name for the tour.

"It sucks that the whole band can't go, but it's also really good for the band because we're still going by The Mandevilles," says Pryne. "We have to look at it in the positive even though we can't all be together doing it."

Like Lesyk, Pryne was dismayed with the band's fortunes of late before getting the call.

"I didn't think it was going to happen, even though I don't want to think like that," she says. "When we got it, it kind of breathed new life into me."

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DSBN centre helping refugees return to class



We have been welcoming students here from around the world for a number of years at the centre. And we continue to work with outside agencies to help support the students."

Superintendent John Dickson

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

They are trickling into the school system, some with little English, others with months of no schooling. A District School Board of Niagara centre is helping these Syrian refugees adjust to their new world.

Superintendent John Dickson, in a report to trust-

tees, said the DSRN Welcome Centre for Newcomer Families is serving as an initial reception and integration site for incoming young Syrian refugees and their families.

"We've found they've been pretty positive to be honest," Dickson said, "I think they're just relieved to (be here)."

The centre, at board head-

quarters, has been in place since 2007. Over the years, it has registered more than 2,700 students to ensure newcomer English language learners get the support they need.

Dickson's report said DSRN staff are meeting with Ministry of Education representatives and local agencies to help co-ordinate the Syrian resettlement effort.

To date, the school board has registered 23 Syrian refugee students. Seventeen are in six elementary schools and a half-dozen are secondary students at St. Catharines Collegiate.

More are expected in coming weeks. Most of those arriving students and their families are in St. Catharines, with a few in Niagara Falls.

"We have been welcoming students here from around the world for a number of years at the centre," said Dickson, superintendent of school support services. "And we continue to work with outside agencies to help support the students."

Among the help for new students are settlement workers in schools and Arabic-speaking contacts. Additional Arabic speaking volunteers are available through the St. Catharines Islamic Society, including a DSRN teacher and staff member.

School board social workers are able to provide trauma, mental health and post traumatic stress disorder support.

At its elementary schools, flexible English as a second language and English literacy development programming supports English language learners.

DSRN secondary schools also offer three ESL/ELD site schools in St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Welland, with associated school credits.

Dickson said DSRN is working closely with the new Niagara Refugee Assistance Committee to help families outside of school hours.

Brandie Lincane, DSRN consultant for cultural and linguistic diversity, said one of the biggest challenges with supporting the refugee students is they have typically been out of school for some time. That means assistance is likely needed

REFUGEES AND NIAGARA CATHOLIC

Niagara Catholic District School Board is prepared for Syrian student refugees.

Education director John Crocco said his board is using its Settlement Workers in Schools program "to engage our students' families and assist with their smooth integration into our communities."

Niagara Catholic's English as a second language teaching teams assess students' English-language proficiency, Crocco said.

It also supports teachers to provide differentiated instruction for English-language learners, and to students, to ensure the instruction they receive supports English-language development and other learning needs.

"Students within our Niagara Catholic schools hail from 110 countries around the world and speak 57 different languages," Crocco said.

"The inclusiveness and diversity of newcomers into Niagara Catholic is an enriching experience for all of our school communities, and truly represents our assertion that all are welcome."

transitioning into a new and unfamiliar educational environment.

"We're helping to introduce them into the classroom teacher, they also have a supporting ESL worker beside them," Lincane said. "They are in regular classrooms and we are supporting them in different ways."

"And it's not just through the classroom teacher, they also have a supporting ESL worker beside them," Lincane said. "And our settlement workers in schools are very, very involved with things that happen outside of school as well."

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NEW LOCATION

Genie winner McCarthy joins Foster Festival

JOHN LAW
Postmedia Network

The inaugural Foster Festival season has added another prominent name to its acting ensemble.

Canadian film and stage star Sheila McCarthy joins the cast of the world premiere of Norm Foster's *Halfway to the North Pole*, which opens Aug. 10 at FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre.

She joins the previously announced Darren Keay, Marla McLean, Lisa Horner and Helen Taylor.

The play is set in Stewiacke, N.S., where four lifelong friends meet each day at a restaurant. Their routine is interrupted by a Toronto doctor who has recently been dumped by his fiancée. While taken aback by the blarney of the Maritime girls, he starts falling for the restaurant's waitress.

McCarthy has won two Genie Awards for film, two Gemini Awards for television and two Dora Awards for theatre. She stars as Sarah Hamoudi in the series *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, and

also appeared as a reporter in *Die Hard 2*. She was most recently seen as Connie Hendrix, the mom of clone Alison in the series *Orphan Black*.

She was married to Canadian actor Peter Donaldson until his death from cancer in 2011.

"We have assembled a dream team of performers for our inaugural season and now, with Sheila McCarthy joining the company, I wake up every day pinching myself," said Foster Festival artistic director Patricia Vanstone. "Our audiences are in for a treat."

The festival launches June 15 to July 2 with Vanstone and Foster himself starring in *On a First Name Basis*. It's followed July 13 to 30 with Melanie Jansen and Jamie Williams starting in *Here on the Flightpath*.

Foster is one of Canada's most successful playwrights, with an estimated 150 productions of his work across the country each year. Part of the festival's mandate is to offer a brand new Foster play each season.



Multi-award winning actress Sheila McCarthy.

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Whether you're considering Casablanas for a Wedding, Bridal Shower, Engagement Party or any other social or corporate event, this is a great day to come in for a look. There is no cost to attend this Open House, but organizers are requesting that visitors bring a non-perishable food item to be donated to the Grimsby Benevolent Fund.

For more information and to RSVP, please call 905-309-7171, 1-877-446-5746, email rsvp@casablancawineryinn.com or go online to www.casablancawineryinn.com upcoming-events.

Canada Games bid powdered for region

**KARENA WALTER
Postmedia Network**

Proponents of a Niagara 2021 Canada Summer Games bid say the event could bring \$85 million to \$100 million to the region in investment and spending.

Niagara Sport Commission members were in Toronto Wednesday for the launch of the Canada Games Council bidding process to learn about requirements and timelines.

The commission is investigating what it would take to make a regional bid application to host the largest multi-sport event in Canada.

"I think Niagara is primed for something like this," said commission CEO Bram Cotten last Wednesday.

"My hope is that we can get the mayors and the regional politicians to stand up and say 'You know what, we want the games. It's our time.'"

St. Catharines city council unanimously supported a Niagara bid in principle on Monday after a presentation by the not-for-profit organization and a report by city staff.

The commission will be visiting Niagara Falls and Welland councils soon and the regional government on Feb. 25 for support.

Held every four years, the summer games could see an estimated 4,600 athletes, coaches and managers from 17 sports converge in Niagara for a 16-day event.

Ontario is confirmed to host the 2021 games — the third time in the province — and it will be up to individual regions or municipalities to make their cases.

St. Catharines Mayor Walter Szendik attended the meeting in Toronto Wednesday and said when looking at what it takes to pull off the games and how expensive it is, he thinks Niagara could crack the top three places to stage it.

"I think it's right within our wheelhouse as a region to do this," he said, adding Niagara can check off the boxes on what it can offer, whether boating on Lake Ontario and Lake Erie to cycling through Short Hills.

He said it costs about \$30 million to put on the games, with \$10.3 million from the province, a similar amount from the federal government and the rest expected from sponsorships and ticket sales. Szendik said he reviewed the past few games and the infrastructure and sport legacy is impressive. Unlike larger events like the Olympics, he said the Canada Games don't "lose money and communities have made additional dollars back."

Cotten said the last summer games in Sherbrooke in 2013 left a \$510,000 surplus and \$2 million in a financial legacy fund. The games in P.E.I. in 2009 had a \$3.3-million surplus.

It's not known how many Ontario

areas will make bids, but a regional sport tourism office in Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and Guelph has expressed interest publicly.

Cotten estimated Niagara has about 85 per cent of the infrastructure and venues necessary to host the games and is in a better position than many places.

"We're proposing a Niagara region-wide bid because it would probably be very difficult for St. Catharines or Welland or Niagara Falls on their own. It's very involved, very complex," Cotten said. "There will be many municipalities that will kick the tires and look but they're not going to meet some of the basic technical requirements."

Niagara's biggest deficit is a stadium for track and field events that would also serve as the site of opening and closing ceremonies.

That's not a "make or break," Cotten said, explaining there are other track and field facilities Niagara could make due with. But a new facility would be a greengrey piece for generations to use, he said.

Niagara could also use more 50-metre pools and a dive tank.

Cotten said there's an opportunity for infrastructure money through the event to build or upgrade facilities.

The commission's plan is to hold events in as many Niagara municipalities as possible, while doing what's most beneficial for the athletes to compete at a high level, he said.

While St. Catharines would be the obvious choice for rowing and Welland for flatwater events, other sports such as beach volleyball, baseball and soccer have multiple options for locations. Sports such as cycling or triathlon would cross more than one municipal border.

"Those decisions happen much farther down the road from where we're at right now," Cotten said. "For us, the big thing is how do we get Niagara to agree we need to be in the game, and once we're in the game we can have those wider, larger types of discussions."

If Niagara Sport Commission does move forward with the bidding process, a letter of intent is due on May 20. The bid fee is about \$30,000, Cotten said.

In July the Canada Games Council will complete site visits and do preliminary bid evaluations. It short-lists eligible bid cities in August. Comprehensive bids and evaluations would happen in the new year with a winning bid announced in April 2017, the year the games will be held in Winnipeg.

Niagara Sport Commission has just come off a successful venture with the 2016 IIHF Under-18 Women's World Championship in St. Catharines, which broke the event's ticket sales.

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Community keeps giving to Cosentino family

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

Two brothers hospitalized with severe burns as a result of a Welland garage fire were recently upgraded to stable condition.

Rob Cosentino, 50, and his brother Cesar Cosentino, 56, were working on a car at 76 Hunter Dr. in on Jan. 30 when a spark from a work light ignited gasoline causing a \$500,000 blaze.

The two men were taken to different hospitals with severe burns. Rob was air lifted to Hamilton General and Cesar to Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto to receive treatment.

Rob's wife, Rosa Cosentino, said last Tuesday that the brothers are both stable condition and undergoing skin graft surgeries.

She said they are both in induced comas. She hasn't had a chance to speak to either of them since the fire.

"They are hanging in there — one day at a time. I'm keeping positive thoughts," she said.

Rosa's sister-in-law and son work at the Sobeyes store located on nearby South Pelham Road.

Sobeyes franchise owner Mike Zolli has decided to help the Cosentinos by col-

lecting money and gift cards.

Assistant manager Karen Roussele said the tragedy has touched many people, including those who work with Rosa and Rob's teenage son.

"It's a very close store ... a lot of them have been working together for 20 years or more. It's touched a lot of people in the store and in the community. Welland is a small community," Roussele said.

The store started collecting donations last week. Roussele said as of last Monday \$3,200 had been raised. She said people are also donating gift cards and are offering to donate clothing.

"Whatever people would like to donate, gift cards are great. Whatever people are comfortable doing. Mike will make sure it will go right to the family," she said.

People can donate at the customer service desk between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. Rosa said it has been "wonderful to see the community come together" for her family.

Last Tuesday afternoon a Go Fund Me page set up by Rosa's aunt, Georgina Seriani, had raised almost \$24,000. To make a donation visit "For the Cosentino Family Fire" at www.gofundme.com/szmjcbvq.



Left: Cesar Cosentino with a snowman.
Right: Roberto Cosentino and his wife Rosa.

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Region wants input on nursing homes

Niagara Region is gathering public input regarding redevelopment of its long-term care homes.

Plans are underway to replace three of the Region's eight long-term care facilities that do not comply with new provincial building standards, including Gilmore Lodge in Fort Erie, Upper Canada Lodge in Niagara-on-the-Lake and Linhaven

in St. Catharines.

To gather information about Niagara residents' priorities and preferences for how and where long-term care services are delivered, a telephone survey will begin today.

Conducted by public opinion research firm Pollara, the survey will run until the end of the month. The company will also conduct a series

of focus groups on the subject.

A similar online survey, open to anyone interested in participating, will be available at niagararegion.ca by the end of next week.

Public input will be used to assist the Region's long-term care redevelopment task force as it develops options for replacing the three facilities.

The surveys and focus groups will

build on consultations that regional staff and task force members have been undertaking with other service providers, community partners and stakeholders.

Results of the research will assist in development of service delivery options, including potential partnerships with private or not-for-profit organizations to deliver a range of on-site services.

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Leisure Loft board game cafe part of a new downtown Welland spirit

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

They're not sure precisely how old the building is, but they know it dates back to at least the 1850s.

They found a photograph published in *The Standard* from the far side of the canal in 1853, showing the building at 30 King St. in the distance.

"We bought it in 1999. Our family thought we were a little bit nuts," said Brenda Herchmer with a laugh.

But Brenda and her husband Vince were struck by the "amazing view" from the building, overlooking the recreational canal and Main Street Bridge.

She said it took "a little bit of imagination," but they were able to see the building's potential. And now, after starting their new business called the Leisure Loft within its walls, the Herchmers have realized the potential they saw in the building when they first purchased it. The Herchmers had been living in Edmonton for the past eight years. Brenda was working under contract with the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association researching ways to help communities work together. Vince worked as a ice maker at a curling club in Edmonton. At the same time, he also ran a "very successful online kite store called horizonzontics.com."

They eventually returned to the Rose City and moved into the building's second floor, complete with its original "creaky" hardwood floors that



Vince and Brenda Herchmer are pictured with board games they have available at Leisure Loft, their cafe at 30 King St. in Welland.

were retained after an extensive renovation.

"When we decided to come back to Welland we had this retail space," Brenda said. "We knew we wanted to sell the kites (at the store), but I was really interested in a community meeting place. My passion for sure is community building."

The couple combined their interests and opened their

cafe in the old building, based on a business model they brought back from Edmonton. While enjoying delicious coffees, teas, baked goods and soup, customers are invited to play an array of board games for \$3 for three hours.

Board game cafes are a growing trend across the country, with four or five similar cafes currently operating in Edmonton. Herchmer said

the concept had yet to find a footing in Niagara, until they started the Leisure Loft.

"It's a new concept and it is catching on. You have the revenue from people coming to play any of the games for three hours," she said.

Customers can also purchase the board games to continue playing at home.

Board games, she said, are having a resurgence in popu-

larity because they offer social interaction that most video games lack.

With free Wi-Fi the cafe is also designed to give people who work from home an alternative place to do their work.

"We've always worked from home," Brenda said. "But when you have young kids, it can be challenging. You get distracted and there are other demands."

She said her business is designed to be conducive to both work and play.

Since starting the business, the Herchmers are more aware of challenges other downtown business owners face — particularly entrepreneurs who are just starting out. "We've had conversations with young business owners, and I think we feel a lot of empathy," Brenda said. "It's tough for young people to start new businesses and yet we need them in downtown. The startup costs are challenging ... You have to have a fair amount of capital to go into business."

When they bought the building in 1999, they were anticipating "something exciting" happening in the city's downtown. At that time, Brenda said, they may have been "ahead of the curve." But now, their cafe is part of the new life coming to the downtown core.

"There are a lot of new businesses moving in downtown. I think there's a spirit we haven't seen here and people are hopeful," Brenda said. "And there are a lot of good things happening, like the concerts on the canal."

Community improvement plan incentives designed to increase the number of people living in the downtown area is also encouraging.

"That's the common denominator of thriving downtowns is that people have to live downtown," she said. "The more people who live downtown the better."

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